

October 27, 2005

STENEHJEM ANNOUNCES “DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN COMMITTEE”

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem has formed the Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Committee to address the needs of children exposed to manufacturing, use, or trafficking of meth in their homes. The committee will develop procedures to coordinate state and local agency resources and services for these children.

“Across the state, law enforcement agencies increasingly find young children in homes where meth has been found,” said Stenehjem. “In some cases, children are playing around the toxic chemicals while their parents manufacture meth. These children have critical needs. A standard procedure will make coordination among agencies easier and ensure these endangered children receive the best help possible while bringing their parents to justice.”

In addition to exposure to toxic chemicals, children from meth homes are exposed to a variety health risks, including malnutrition, abuse, and neglect. “From foster care to medical treatment, many different agencies must work together to help these children recover and heal,” said Stenehjem.

Last year, the Attorney General’s office held Drug Endangered Children training in three North Dakota cities, emphasizing the need for standard procedures and coordinated efforts for law enforcement, child welfare, treatment providers and the court system. The DEC committee resulted because of those meetings.

Many different resources are represented on the fifteen-member committee, including doctors and health care providers, law enforcement, emergency responders, the juvenile court, social service agencies, prosecutors, and legislators. Stenehjem has appointed Assistant Attorney General Jon Byers and Gladys Cairns, the Administrator of Child Protection Services for the North Dakota Department of Human Services, as co-chairs.

Also serving on the committee: Dallas Carlson, BCI; Grand Forks County Sheriff’s Deputy Mike Fonder; Dennis Johnson, Pembina County juvenile court; Ron Kunda, Bismarck Fire Department; Ray Lambert, State Fire Marshal; Senator Judy Lee; Chief Debra Ness, Bismarck Police Department; Dr. Alonna Norberg, Meritcare Health Systems; Representative Todd Porter (a paramedic); Representative Clara Sue Price; Rick VanCamp, Cass County Social Services; Michelle Vietz, Coordinator, EMS for Children; and Peter Welte, Grand Forks County State’s Attorney.

The committee’s first meeting will be held tomorrow. Stenehjem anticipates the committee’s work will be completed within the next few months and a protocol will be available for use in local communities across the state.

###